

AARTS, TONY, M.F.A. In the Time of the Foxhole. (2007)  
Directed by Prof. Stuart Dischell. 40 pp.

This thesis is a collection of poems that have developed through the need and hope to bridge gaps of experience, sense, and manifestations of the self. They range widely while sharing threads of sentiment. In this collection I hope to explore the world, that is itself constantly elusive.

IN THE TIME OF THE FOXHOLE

By

Tony Aarts

A Thesis Submitted to  
the Faculty of The Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master in Fine Arts

Greensboro  
2007

Approved by

---

Committee Chair

©2007 by Tony Aarts

For my brother

## APPROVAL PAGE

This Thesis has been approved by the following committee of the  
Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Members \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

---

Date of Acceptance by Committee

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my committee chair, Stuart Dischell for his generous time and counsel in writing this collection. Thanks also to Jennifer Grotz and Linda Gregg for all their tutelage and enthusiasm in and out of conferences. Thank you to my fellow classmates, peers and the MFA program of UNCG.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Deaths of the Insects.....	2
How to Build a Field.....	3
Bedroom Medicine.....	4
A Few Reasons not to Load the .22.....	5
To My Fearful Brother, Shark .....	6
Thief .....	7
The Cockroach Collective.....	8
Under Watch in a Village.....	9
Fate is a Butcher, a Painter.....	10
Tornado, Dodge County .....	11
The Houseguest in the Wings.....	12
Still Lives of the Regiment .....	13
When Considering Lacy.....	14
Contortionist Song.....	15
Rough Sketch of an Animal in Motion .....	16
The Mid 90s .....	17
Poem for Brother Passing through Thorns .....	18
Days of the Orchard .....	19
Making a Quiet Weapon.....	20
The Son .....	21
Things Can Be So Ugly.....	22
Messages Found Between Working Gears.....	23
What the Hands Have Done .....	24
Introducing the Task to a God .....	25
At the High School Football Game.....	26
Last Night was Long and Black, Lead to the Itemization of Hairs on a Hand.....	27
To Have One Thread.....	28
At the End of an Idle Night.....	29
Strings.....	30
Back Room Exchange .....	31
Filling a Glass with Sand .....	32
Costume Party .....	33
The Quiet Doctors.....	34
An Odd God at the Silo .....	35
The Campsite.....	36
Robot Standing in an Empty City .....	37
Tossing Stones Under Big Bear .....	38
The Late Serpent Life.....	39

<b>Ronin .....</b>	<b>40</b>
--------------------	-----------



*“O love of my life, our flesh  
is pulled away no matter.  
Foot slam.  
How we try.  
Foot slam.  
To hold each other in our mouths.”*

-Dean Young

## Deaths of the Insects

### I.

Flaming in the oak tree, smothered red and gold,  
the honeycombed wasp's nest topples.  
The seared Chinese lantern bursts in violent wing-beats  
as thoraxes settle like downed satellites across the yard.

### II.

Or the sight of Pompey in an upturned digit,  
crippled black frames of ants caught in worship.  
Avenues of escape rendered moot  
when the city floor becomes the closed fist.

### III.

Close by the sidewalk one wing catches the wind.  
A monarch butterfly's broken legs, smeared  
sails, clothes on the line that cannot fly.  
Orange and black creases like a flag for shadows.

### IV.

From end to end a colony thrives  
through the gutted crossbeam of a den.  
Termites crawl over each other's diligent frames .  
They demolish the house, every plank is found hollow.

This is one way you find the tunnels inside yourself.

### **How to Build a Field**

Pass the fossils of things unnamed,  
slabs of iron ore and silver, lost gems  
of native kings whose bones lie white,  
piled into buried hills. The molten core  
is a flaming head planted in its cradle,  
talking to itself. The glacial boulders  
sleep and dream. Tell them you are some wind.  
Count bullet casings that speckle oak roots.  
Shoots of grass bow down under deer flanks,  
a truck's backfire erupts pheasants  
from frosted ditch weeds. For each wing  
tie another strand of barb-wire line.  
Several muddy bottles should be shot into shards.  
Where hunters follow the prints of dogs,  
trace your shape in the snow beside them as witness.  
Mournful barks call to the forest's entry.

## Bedroom Medicine

Beaten shadows are the pioneers of my ceiling.  
These roaming packs of geometry, afterthoughts  
of windows. They wander past the propeller  
that pumps the square heart of a white room.  
The ready-made fan blades quiver  
Like waiting splints.

As tunnels of headlights pass through a grimy pane  
like a microscope's lens ogling activity  
papery leaf shadows spasm on the wall  
like flimsy X-rays. Shuffled fractures  
of branches desiccated.  
Something is about to die,

so I grow frantic in bed, work in the dark.  
Close the gash sprung open with my cold body.  
It worms under the plush skin,  
slashed blankets, the tossed covers.  
I make myself a stitch then,  
hoping to mend the bed.

I become this eager tourniquet wrapped  
expertly on rows of the unbloodied.  
There are no wounds, no injury yet  
to be seen. And then a siren,  
distant, shrill—in the darkness  
of my own head it calls.

## **A Few Reasons not to Load the .22**

Black smears between the bare trees.  
The crows have been droning all morning.

They pass overhead like someone taught ink to fly,  
dark scarves sewn with needles of hollow bone.

On county road 4 they're commiserating  
in the blue shears of a winter combine.

Braggarts hop in the yard, the known—  
knowing mice scurry across gravel drives,

known as cartographers of a town, circling locales,  
yards patrolled by the farmer's rifle.

On a highway shoulder near Kenyon road kill lays crowded  
by nervous claws, beaks breaking skin.

Concerned with the body's afterlife,  
they dig reverently for the soul.

**To My Fearful Brother, Shark**

Because you follow blood  
on ghost lines  
I see we both cannot help ourselves.

We are very tired and do not sleep.

When you bare your teeth, rows bow down,  
a mouth like an arena.  
You know one song and I hear it.

The currents are filled with final channels  
you travel to shear the end of another life.

Your jaws are white as snow on a sickle.  
You must be filled with awful crags.

When your eyes roll back, do you see me?

You and I are clouds crushing each other without a sound.

## Thief

Pith helmets. Everyone in this cave wears pith helmets as they sleep, because who knows. I peer over the inscriptions, the battle scars and carvings. It's difficult to run while carrying a bag full of pith helmets. Linden scruff cracks under my feet and I see the city walls up ahead. I arrive to find the rain-soaked doors do not open. I use a pith helmet to break one down and blossoms shower out. How desperate they look. Break another door and unfelt needles chitter like glinting bird's bones. Hurried angles of light crowd around the helmets like mice. These helmets could bring me a heavy purse, but where is everyone? I stand in the square like a tree in a frame. If I live forever I will be tired. Tired of these pith helmets. But I love them, I'm safe inside them. When the monitoring clouds pass overhead there's no need to worry. I'm inside a helmet. A mottled eye keeps watch here.

## **The Cockroach Collective**

They are clastic,  
truly of the underground,  
society ever behind  
the baseboard, traversing  
mildew lining kitchen pipes,  
of a quick horde, collective  
surveyors, chitin shell  
holding all those old directives.  
They skitter on stiff sheets  
of Key West motels, stock-still  
vigils beneath arc welder  
sparks scattering to concrete  
and engine grease of the garage.  
Between rooms they scribe our talk.  
Feelers weave on a beam.  
Their consortium stands  
more sturdy than ours,  
housing the atomic rays  
well past our porous bones.  
Syntax never bothers them;  
before there were our fires  
and after our cities sink,  
they will make a home of ruin.  
Through cellars, under fuse boxes  
or in the basement laundry room  
they live in their own coffins.  
The resilient pendants shirk light.  
Always unfinished, and in death,  
a bullet fast asleep.



### **Under Watch in a Village**

Shackles choked our wrists in city squares. We tried to show  
the burning coins in our mouths as onlookers trudged towards the capitol.

We were starving, stole every last thread of red  
from the fox's den. Black, tattered veils

wound round each face as we were made to walk  
past stained glass windows. The revolts ran contrary.

We heard spies assassinate themselves under the bridge at dusk.  
A beggar condemned binary stars flashing over his campfire.

We continued walking, whispering into blue-frosted grasses.  
None of us could see the city's smokestacks any longer.

At the border every cloud was sewn into a petticoat that sunk at sea  
while we wept on the sand, finished our soup, our crusts of bread.

Clutching chapped hands, we were lined under a single, leafless tree.  
The sky lowered from its perch with the first shot

to sleep on our bodies fed by silence.

### **Fate is a Butcher, a Painter**

Because fate dons a white apron with the stains.  
Because the canvas holds all our faces.  
Because it hangs the steel cleaver in the steam-filled shop.  
Because ochre fields surround us and its brush made it so.  
Because we are the sow's filmy black eye that rolls white.  
Because great pains were taken to shape our ends.  
Because a blade is a mouth that knows one word.  
Because in the drying, acrylic trees there is a bird lifting.  
Because fate makes a blade speak that word.  
Because in the bird is a music box fate winds.  
Because fate wrote, "Tonight's sky is countless black colts shivering."  
Because fate wrote, "Tonight's sky is what the underworld has dreamt."  
Because on our faces are expressions we've not yet used.  
Because we are its saddest secret,  
quiet now, we that barely have our breath.

### **Tornado, Dodge County**

A German farmhand bows his head  
under cellar steps—the shock  
as the iron latch shakes loose.  
Out in the yard the soaked linen  
with rough stitches rolls in sheaves  
of pasture grass. An oil lamp is lit,  
its casement broken, as the men stare  
at the round faces of children  
who will not move from the stairs.

## **The Houseguest in the Wings**

Whatever happened to the hostess?  
She was pouring a generous gin and tonic  
into the silver tumbler when the sound fell.

Across a parquet floor the wine bottle rolls  
until it settles into a hallway shadow.

I see a winsome couple sleeping at the hearth.

Now is the time for uneasy solace  
as out the bay window snow quilts  
onto the fields. Everyone sleeping here  
will not wake again. The fields are cassocks.

I worry this is the end and fold my shirt away.  
I have the feeling I've been locked in this house for years.

After placing a letter beside the bowl of peaches  
I steal the sledge from a lean-to tool shed.

The trees creak at the acreage line  
with their multifarious engines of warning.

Dragging the blade over the hills unearths  
speckled beasts who show the way to a tilted city.

## Still Lives of the Regiment

\*

A deer ruts in the stubbled field  
and when we spy it, turns its wet flanks  
back towards the fog. A crown of claws hung in the gray branches.

\*

My hands look like sickles as I lift a cup of rum.

\*

We walk all day under a sun that burns the portrait  
of a god we still do not know.

\*

Puddles turn to ice, lost portholes. A young recruit lingers,  
touches the chipped blue plane with mud-caked boots.

\*

When a scout takes his tears down, he threads them  
into gears for a pocket watch. We stop marching.  
As birds abandon a hillside, he stares into their absence.

\*

We pass through each other's ghosts, following a voice that follows another.  
The forests in us grow dim.

## When Considering Lacy

You finally stop futzing with your lip ring,  
content to speak over grocery store seasonal radio.  
I hear your voice: "Why can't you just get on a plane,  
it's idiotic, road trips aren't always wholesome."  
You tweeze your hair into kinks like wet straw.  
It's elusive and soundless. Then it snows all night.  
Awkward notes penned onto bus tickets  
slipped in a blue locker, #29 at the Y,  
where you know I'll wonder over the intention.  
I am like a pillow stuffed with muffled thorns,  
you know that much, which scares me.  
We could never move to Iceland, we'd have nothing  
left to talk about. You punch a dog near the aquarium  
while I drop my mouth to glittery pieces.  
Everything between us hangs like desperate constellations  
with no stories left. You're asleep on the couch.  
This is Wisconsin and I'm drunk again,  
piles of med school papers on your desk.  
Lacy, my bed crawls for the door. It looks for  
the bohemian jewelry, sound of your bare feet  
shuffling in winter for the ratty quilt. Every photo  
is a historical forgery when you label them  
under dark room lights. We'll never see 1924.  
After the keyboardist pukes mid riff  
you whisper all the art's been tapped from the vein.  
A wool stocking cap over your brow, you pass  
the Triple Rock and I fidget with these maps.  
They're plastered under our skin and I am sorry  
it took me this long to find them. You're fading out.  
Your static needling this chest.

### **Contortionist Song**

She's shot full of stage lights, creeping across the wooden slats. A shadow twists  
against violet curtains, smoke curling onstage from the audience.

Their eyes gleam like scratched nickels as the cigar tips pulse in and out  
from the stands above a knot of lace and breath, legs,  
nubile feet flexing with each step into the familiar dance.

She wants to fill the barren spaces with her body, the answer of muscle to become sewn,  
thread of limbs, the winding bones. They bend with her weaving,  
the spine's arc, a beaded hill. People rise clapping, they loom like black trees  
stirring the air of the tent. She inches away. Chest shudders as the floor shakes.  
She undoes the encryption of her bones, hears the unfastening, a breaking note.

### **Rough Sketch of an Animal in Motion**

In the morning the heart builds a trebuchet  
because it doesn't believe desire is subtle.  
Ditto, it doesn't honor cease fires at all.  
The heart traces its own mad graffiti  
of desperate words like, "Most elephants  
weigh less than God." I sit and pitch in a chair  
because of its engine, ceaseless turning, flailing windmill.  
When I stir a bowl of egg drop soup I wonder  
about the melody in my side, I wonder  
if the heart is a record to scratch.  
It runs from the parapets I built,  
it raises feeble stone walls,  
tells the children in its town how to hold knives.  
It is scared and thin and threadbare.  
The heart is a beetle caught in the dust.  
I walk along the heart on a rusted trellis,  
listen: the crow makes a nest in its crown.



### The Mid 90s

The barn stands red and blistered,  
Wasioja, MN. Feet pad over past years,  
over musty hay and the dust  
from floorboards of a rickety loft.  
We gather in the dim light, reforming  
our own shapes like cool balls of clay.  
Warmth traces through holes in a tin roof.  
Steps plunge until we careen out  
of the black window. Behind us the pliable  
cloth of our selves growing soiled with change.  
A drift against the barn, Jim Orr's plow  
hunkered on the pickup's grill.  
Each time we pass through the window,  
breaking from the frame into wind-swept yard,  
the sharp smell of our tomorrows galvanize.  
I'm an animal bursting from creation,  
one and only of its kind, heavy with breath.

### Poem for Brother Passing through Thorns

When the crowing began no one else felt it. Outside, our father tilled a patch of corn with the International Harvester. The crowing perched on your ribs and stayed, so you lay on your bed, stared at the ceiling while a static of wasps wrapped your head. Most nights we were up late watching eighties horror films, infomercials on salad shooters. We talked about why whales are much larger than zoologists believe. It has to do with inner dimensions. We compared scar topographies. I'll try to imagine you in stop-motion photography now. Picture me in an aperture. Keep still. I break things some nights in an alley. Is it loud inside you too? There's a colossus that walks back and forth between your eyes, but we both sew sadness into skull caps for the winter. There's enough snow around our home to keep us in. We'll feather across the rooms calling to one another with voices of smoke, draped in the quilts our mother left us sleeping in.

### **Days of the Orchard**

Grubs root in the moss near the creek  
where several charred trunks sit mystified  
by the scent of their own burnt pulp.

Silt, clay, I wade the water, find a rabbit's skull  
tufted with a vestige of brown fur.

The standing trees look elsewhere, pointing at everything.

I have no answers for the rabbit that fed the hawk.

I stare at the lattice work of branches  
hoping to see the system between them.

Every night the blossoms shake in their bells,  
and every night, before I learn anything,  
fires sprout through the orchard like torches.

Then the fox canters down the lane  
with another truth caught in its teeth.

## **Making a Quiet Weapon**

At times, meaning most, there are questions no one can answer,  
and this leaves one the chance to sew a coat of moths.

Thread their ashy bodies, plated wings, but never wear the thing.  
The coat, like a cloud, holds a new purpose  
once we see some other shape flitting in it  
like a bird's shadow. Namely, the world's frantic clawing.

All clouds are tableaus.  
They're smeared across the sky like moths' wings.

There are questions in the water and I stare open-mouthed.  
My sparking mouth.

It leaves trails of cinders that I retrace  
hoping to find my way back to a beginning.

I find the beginning. It is a room filled with arrows.

It seems each moment is a puppet with cut strings  
as soon as you wish to see it again.

Walk further into the fog of a disheveled house.  
There is a pained face receding in the gray,  
and although you cannot be sure of anything,  
draw closer.

## The Son

Another scattershot star paints itself white to hide its heavy curses. The past snarls. The past trims its ghastly hedges while the star hangs over an ocean. When my father tells me how to live in the world, he hears his own past rising on all four paws. If my father leaves, I stand under the sky with small hands. I carry his mark like a searing insignia as the future sharpens its blades. Lucent snow and smoking crofts grow in the distance. Feet toll under restless pines as the animals draw near. I lean down, whisper my frail name.

## Things Can Be So Ugly

\*

Hail pitches in volleys  
against the costly siding.

\*

The mantle of ridge  
is lined with birches like matches.  
Blazing through autumn, they beg.  
One jag of lightning torches trunks into wallpaper shrapnel.

\*

Out on the beach are the fish,  
chain mail of their bodies forfeit.  
In the quick tide change they reek  
on bits of sand,  
useless swim bladders.  
Frowning on the sight,  
evolution pedals backwards.  
A reverse assembly line of covetous gulls  
gutting along the shore  
are happy to be so whole.

\*

And the moths play as Icarus.  
They crash against porch lights in shuttles of exoskeleton  
that puff pollen on the deck.  
All night diving against the sun of an incandescent bulb,  
burning their hulls in uncommon joy.

### Messages Found Between Working Gears

Written in a cistern, this letter crawls through urges.

Read: *feed a lie with straw, joy's welcome wound, regret is a wooden crown.*

Old head, don't worry, it's quiet here.

Hairs of ink run down the page, blot blue petals  
Where words spill together like fallen herds.

Above, those that search press their ears to the dirt  
And shout I cannot leave them.

I hear horses stomp across the bascules of the world.  
A cavalry without riders. We are not whole.

We are so many blind rockslides dashing one another.

I'm trying to remember that much, but all this ringing—  
An iron bell holds my heart for a clapper.

### **What the Hands Have Done**

Shook loose the mud stuck in the spade  
Held a shouting child his heart rattling  
Lifted the spotted pumpkin in the patch  
Under which one crushed field mouse  
Cupped rainwater after the storm  
Cupped blood from the split lip  
As birds swept over the playground  
Broke the hallway plaster broke the bone  
Broken wall and then ridged surgical scars  
Coiled like ten snakes at the table  
Touched with careful lies offered thanks  
Sliced a loaf of bread fought in the brush  
Of night of the trouble riddled head  
Clawed beside the cypress tree dug down  
Into black soil River Falls Wisconsin  
Tore from the ditch weeds a nickel of 1972



### **Introducing the Task to a God**

Your bite mark is a door through which everything must pass.

You are the machinery, the patchwork fires.

To touch the souls brings a ringing. It does not end.

Your bed of ashen leaves. Everything sheds skin for you.

Here is a chair you will never leave.

Your head crammed with a devil's snakes.

### **At the High School Football Game**

Kids tag graffiti onto each other's cars. The sky is a swollen, amber belly glazed by stadium lights, parking decks. Fans stream into the stands from dim access tunnels, wild, painted faces. Tower lights flash on. A drunk punches straight through the ticket booth as several guards drag him away. In the distance the water tower hovers over housetops like a blue cloud. As the sky clears the stars glint like stolen teeth and between them satellites braid the town. A siren pitches down the road. When the tattoo-spotted waitress points at me, I have roughly fifteen seconds before the townsfolk recognize my face. From the trestle bridge I still hear the game's roar, the loudspeaker asking everyone to remain calm. I'm whistling a song and my skeleton whispers it back and this is why they always make me go.

**Last Night was Long and Black, Lead to the Itemization of Hairs on a Hand**

Sleeping too long between buildings, I want the before and after at once.  
I have many mouths that eat too much.

When the mechanics dismantle my chest they stare at the spent sockets,  
candles left with a tear of wax, darkening inner alleys.

With no light left the body resembles a black factory:  
Here's an ear drum, clavicle, memory of a thorn.

Homeless is when the floor mourns your shadow.  
Homeless is when the bone forgets the skin.

### **To Have One Thread**

The soul curses and cannot remember  
where it has been, rakes the ground  
with its hoof. It cannot cross water  
and follows the river's shoreline,  
tries to pry a fish out of the shallows.  
The soul breathes raggedly,  
birds bolt from their branches  
as it calls to them. The maps were wrong,  
scores of errors in its plans,  
its armor tagged with dents and scars.  
When it approaches people they beat it  
with bundles of sticks, turn it away.  
It loses a paw to a trap. Hunters follow.  
At night, beyond a campfire's glow,  
the soul watches the empty meadow  
that the wind pushes. It wants to sleep.  
The men train their rifles on its silhouette  
as the soul steps out into the clearing.

### **At the End of an Idle Night**

If ice clinks in its glass, the scotch is almost gone. You meander about the closet looking for a letterman's jacket: State champ, first time making love in a hatchback. If you hear a ticking sound, it's the grandfather clock or something much worse. Worse. From the plastic, weather-sealed window you see a fire erupting from the horse stable. If the stable boy runs into the misty yard screaming, he wears a hat and the hat is burning. If you pondered how many mice lived in the stable, know that there were seven, but you only spy five burnt tails like wicks scurrying into the rose bushes. Beyond that, nothing too exciting takes place: the boy walks home, the mice shiver in their fear. If you open the velvet jewelry box in your lover's dresser drawer before turning in, you find a tooth. She's climbing the rickety stairs.

## Strings

The green field collapses because it is a wave.  
Shocked deckhands beseech their captain. Sunk.  
Don't do everything alone,  
don't think to thwart the glowing, silver dials.  
Instead, let's pull our houses apart string by string  
to better understand the purple flowers  
clutched in the fists of our stomachs. Let's not move.  
Don't mind the hands shaking, the bones muted by gags.  
We could be the basement jukebox carrying on all night  
in the empty mansion. How long, our unheard sounds?  
To be a Victrola lodged in the whale  
or dressed in snow, learning the ways of a deserted street.  
Let's pull these strings, the frayed ones of impermanence.  
Soon we'll sleep, eyes shut like stage curtains.  
Someone plans to cut our tender, red wires,  
rake us by our waists onto the dance floors of the other-where.  
Render the sky a nest. Even the consuming alleys allow the sky.

### **Back Room Exchange**

Would you like a seat?  
During the effigy's burning.

Will there be an ending?  
Not yet, the steeple remains in the grass.

When is the ending?  
When the equations are drug in from the harrowed fields.

How will we know them?  
As Ronin curled over their short swords.

Tell the truth.  
Truth is that when it burns  
a prefect shouts, "Fire is a pantomime of the house."

What of the ending?  
Siftings of red clay.  
A dagger buried hilt deep.

We will be safe.  
Yes, safe in a veranda that swells with shadows.  
You're going to wear the needled sins like shawls.

### **Filling a Glass with Sand**

To be honest there is a shepherd with shearing blades.  
He clings to his work, stays busy mending my leaning fences.

I know this because he's what I have made to forget you.

Dark clouds of sheep drift aimlessly  
across the stony cliffs. Here is where I always try to leave you behind.

Even as winter settles inside me again,  
I see you walking in their flocks.

Another bouldered wall to raise,  
another frost to push you back.

Some nights he nearly recalls how he came to be,  
but I've mortared his throat.  
No splintered words of you coming down the stairs,  
barefoot, feeling the warm grass.

When the sun is ushered down, you can hear his head.  
It's full of wind. Like mine.

You should know you are the gilded carriage he burns.  
I regret it each time he swabs the oil from his hands,  
hikes back to a small farmhouse, scratching a tuft of gray hair.

At times he is drunk.  
A horn of wine on the dirt floor.

He has these plows he must pull.

I like to think he'll forgive me one day.



## Costume Party

Clusters of finches travel many miles  
to crash into a wall of clenched teeth.

It is difficult to carry a sound within yourself.

You'll need this helmet, this trident,  
for the musty tunnels. Push the heart through  
because after a time it knows how to kill what's killing it.

Lion in this pit, you look like love, don't you?  
I'll stake this joke and believe it in the same breath.  
The miners scaling our throats are not free yet.

I'm painting green eyes on the walls,  
I'm hit bad—then the unreachable eject lever.

Traveling like a test-pilot with the despondent space crew,  
I shake. They recycle talks of wormholes, play poker.  
They sleep in while years rear away.

A multitudinous supercomputer tells me it's tired  
of waiting for some tether to draw it close.  
It asks, "*What are you built with, how are you lost?*"

## The Quiet Doctors

Bleary-eyed men returned with spades on mud-caked shoulders. Trundling their leather cases, doctors unveiled nervous tools. Mr. L's eyes were found under the subway. An orderly labeled canopic jars. Perforated shelving, color-coded organ failings. Light rain pebbled the employee lot. No letter was left at the nightstand when Mr. L went missing. Documents on a safe deposit box. Electrical treatments realigned muscle, mind moth-eaten rewoven, a voice re-shelled at the throat. Quiet days passed. Copper wire poached from fallout shelters stitched bones, but no one's brought back. No one pull the black scruff of elsewhere out of its den to lie on a table. Mr. L refused his soup. Mr. L wrote in his journal, "There are apiaries behind my eyes." Thoughts read erratic in tests like a bowl holding water, then snow. Personal articles packed into a leather trunk, freight passage to Greenland and a waterproof compass. Months passed, the lab closed. No mention of the childlike writings sent by air mail. Questions and questions, pictures of wasps scrawled on hotel stationary. In the lab's basement collection rows of water-stained filings, black and white photos a doctor burns with his cigarette. Photo of Mr. L's chest open like a vault. Mr. L's heart thawed on a tray beside a clock. Outside it rained. The doctor's stub flickers. Mr. L's soul had a dozen nails in it.

### **An Odd God at the Silo**

Among the grains of rice on a table,  
the twisted crack in an iron pot,

was a god I saw at the door way.  
One that I came across in the winter.

It was unnerving, watching it stroll  
through a rocky field with the dogs.

Or at night,  
as my toes stood up like pink monks,

in it came, full grown and quiet—  
the door winced for hours, I poured a beer.

Dung aged in the pens, a barn slept through spring.  
We meant to change the plow's shears.

If only the felt cloak had been removed,  
and if we'd known where to begin.

## The Campsite

They huddle and pass a flask of bourbon back and forth, pawing at the tattered map. A smashed tin cup beside the fire pit. Thawing snow on a hat's brim. Things aren't going well. Mornings spent digging trenches with stolen trowels and always that fear of those in the pillbox. At least one man has a good book to read, but you'll never finish it. Their faces smattered with fear curl like burning leaves and the catafalque you built is thirty hands high. That night searchlights tear through the cypress tress. Feet thudding through wet snow. Pull out the chrome kill switch in your breast pocket. Apologize, if you like.

## **Robot Standing in an Empty City**

Noxious fogs drape the skyline it gazes on. A year ago every man, woman and child left. They wore bulky suits, waved goodbye from shining, pristine platforms. Their shuttles left jet stream traces, and the boosters fell back to earth like gears a god had broken. It marches through the Midwest, standing amid silos, trying to communicate with radio towers like they were some idol. It marches to California for nothing, but once there finds the remains of others that had cowered in subterranean shelters. Power cells torn from chest compartments scattered among rubble. It stands there for three days. It runs its silver hands through a row of corn. It is unvisited by birds. When it reaches Detroit the ice masks its face like a ghoul. Blocks upon blocks of empty cars. Deer pass through, sifting for food, skittish brown limbs crossing intersections. Blue and red lights blink from its insides. It threw away its own chest plate just to see them. For the next year it decides to watch the pier erode under the tide's pull. Its eyes are a city's orphaned light. A doe watches its pulsing frame pass beneath a neon marquee.

### **Tossing Stones Under Big Bear**

A silo breaks through the thick,  
chain-linked fence of nightfall,  
raises its plated face.

A dog's howl.

Night strung over fields, over the yard  
where a tin watering can lies on its side full of shadows.

The silent stable.

Stars pose animals and gods,  
constellations heaving their points on their backs.

## The Late Serpent Life

\*

Dogs ribbon out of the tree line with yellow eyes.

\*

The trickle of scales  
like Spanish coins falling from my chest.

\*

Straw stuffed doll left in the dirt,  
children's toys with forked tongues hanging out of their mouths.

\*

Her smile beneath a mauve parasol.

\*

Wings of flax. Cheap, flaked, emerald scales.  
The villagers laugh and jab the actor.  
They spill their wine in the grass.

\*

My face reflected in the sow's waiting eye.

## **Ronin**

Now I see that the soul clatters  
in a handful of coins, that haloes are nailed in.  
The dark trundles ourselves back to us.

Someone give me a wagon for the shame.

I have so many crude leanings tonight.  
They're chinked with clay and straw,  
honest failures and the withered retreats:

Because I knew myself to be a wooden horse  
burning in its own flames  
when the tresses were let down.

There are enough nights on this table  
to fill the buckled shell of a split star.

Greet the oncoming spears as friends.